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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000214

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: GRILLING OF JUSTICE MINISTER UNEVENTFUL; PERSONAL FEUD LIKELY BEHIND ALLEGATIONS

REF: A. KUWAIT 0036

[B](#). 04 KUWAIT 04219

[1](#)1. Summary: In what is being described as the most bland grilling yet, Justice Minister and MP Ahmed Baqer, the only Salafi in the cabinet, was grilled by liberal MP Jamal Al-Omar on January 10 for nine hours. Al-Omar is known to have a personal feud with the Justice Minister and this is likely to have influenced his decision to grill the minister. The grilling ended in a fashion similar to the previous inquiry against Minister of State Sharar, with a recommendation to initiate a study to look into the alleged irregularities, this time, at the Public Authority for Minor's Affairs (PAMA). End Summary.

Grilling Results in Trivial Committee "Investigation"

[1](#)2. The grilling of Justice Minister and MP Ahmed Baqer by liberal MP Jamal Al-Omar, the fifth in the current National Assembly which began July 2003, was described as drab and unconvincing and was also the most poorly attended as most MPs departed to their offices or a common room to follow the proceedings on TV. (Note: Justice Minister and MP Ahmed Baqer, the only Salafi in the cabinet, is one of three Islamist ministers. The other two Islamists in the cabinet are Health Minister Dr. Mohammed Al-Jarallah and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Abdullah Al-Maatouq. End Note.) At one point, only 12 MPs were present in the session and most were talking among themselves apparently paying little attention to the deliberations.

[1](#)3. The debate lasted over nine hours during which Al-Omar charged that serious violations in the Public Authority for Minor's Affairs (PAMA) took place and that the Justice Minister refused to attest marriage contracts to bidoon couples (stateless Arabs), allegedly a ploy to get bidoon to give up their pursuit of Kuwaiti citizenship. Al-Omar described this as a violation of Islamic teachings and human rights principles. In his 122 page motion, Al-Omar also accused Baqer of taking no action against investments that involved trading in pork and accepting interest -- both actions are forbidden in Islam -- by the Public Authority for Minor Affairs (PAMA), which falls under Baqer's ministerial authority. In his presentation of PAMA's irregularities, Al-Omar also claimed the public authority cheated some recipients from funds entitled to them.

[1](#)4. Baqer defended his position saying the grilling was a personal attack because most of the accusations took place before he became Justice Minister. Baqer also defended himself against the pork allegations saying immediately after hearing about the matter, a decision was issued by the cabinet to tighten measures against the entry of pork products. Baqer challenged Al-Omar in the discussions to produce any substantiated violations or irregularities committed by PAMA officials saying the authority had been praised by the GOK and the independent audit bureau. Baqer also stated there is no official policy to ban the attestation of marriage contracts of bidoon couples or marriages involving bidoons. The grilling ended uneventfully when 11 MPs called for the formation of a committee by the Ministry of Justice to investigate the allegations. (Comment: The decision to investigate the allegations is most likely a face-saving measure designed to pacify MPs on both sides of the argument and is unlikely to lead to any meaningful resolution of the allegations. End Comment.)

Liberals vs. Islamists or Personal Feud?

[1](#)5. All three mainstream Sunni Islamic groups supported the Justice Minister's case. The Sunni Islamic Bloc held a meeting on January 9 to publicly defend Baqer's "clean record" as an MP and minister. Despite MP Al-Omar's accusations, none of the charges gained much traction during the session. Many observers saw this inquiry as a tit-for-tat response by liberals to the Islamist's unrelenting attacks on non-Sunni-Islamist cabinet ministers.

[1](#)6. (Comment: This grilling more likely rose from a personal feud between Al-Omar and Baqer. In 2004, Baqer was known to

have accused Al-Omar of corruptly buying his parliamentary seat. Al-Omar responded to the attack inquiring how Bager was ever appointed a minister and saying that he was not even fit to be a teaboy in a ministry. End Comment)

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